

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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AMEMBASSY RABAT

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 5375

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, MO, IS
SUBJECT: BEN-SIMHON COMMENTS ON NEWS OF MORE ISRAELI VISITS TO
MOROCCO

REF: A. TEL AVIV 4353 B. RABAT 3165

1. SHAUL BEN-SIMHON, CHAIRMAN OF THE WORLD CONGRESS OF
NORTH AMERICAN JEWS, TOLD EMBOFF JULY 18 THAT THE NORTH
AFRICAN AS WELL AS THE ORIENTAL JEWISH COMMUNITIES REMAIN
PUZZLED BY MOROCCAN INVITATIONS SUCH AS THAT TO BARUCH
ABUTHATZEIR, THE DEPUTY MAYOR ASHKELON AND COUSIN OF
THE NEW MINISTER OF RELIGION, TO VISIT MOROCCO AND TO BE
RECEIVED BY KING HASSAN. IN GENERAL, THEY VIEW WITH
DEEP SUSPICION INVITATIONS BY SUCH ARAB LEADERS AS SADAT,
ASSAD, OR AL BAQR OF IRAQ THAT JEWS FROM ARAB COUNTRIES
RETURN TO THEIR HOMELAND. THE ARABS, THEY FEAR, ARE
SEEKING TO ENTICE THE ORIENTAL JEWISH COMMUNITY
INTO ABANDONING ISRAEL TO THE PALESTINIANS, THUS
BRINGING ABOUT THE ULTIMATE DESTRUCTION OF THE
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JEWISH STATE. THEY SIMILARLY VIEW MOROCCAN INVITATIONS
WITH UNEASE, BUT ARE STRUCK BY THE INVITATIONS TO
ISRAELI PERSONALITIES TO BE RECEIVED BY THE KING AS
WELL AS BY RECENT CONCESSIONS GRANTING THE JEWISH COMMUNITY
AUTONOMY FOR REGULATING ITS INTERNAL AFFAIRS.

2. BEN-SIMHON CLAIMED THAT HE HAD DISCUSSED HIS JUNE

TRIP TO MOROCCO WITH PRIME MINISTER BEGIN AND FOREIGN MINISTER DAYAN. BOTH HAD BEEN INTERESTED IN THE POTENTIAL USEFULNESS OF THE "MOROCCAN CONNECTION" FOR INITIATING AN ARAB-JEWISH DIALOGUE. HOWEVER, ACCORDING TO BEN-SIMHON, THEY HAD BEEN NONCOMMITTAL ABOUT GIVING OFFICIAL SANCTIONS TO SUCH CONTACTS UNTIL AND UNLESS THEY GET A SOMEWHAT CLEARER PICTURE OF THE REAL INTENTIONS BEHIND MOROCCAN ENCOURAGEMENT OF SUCH VISITS BY ISRAELIS. HE SAID THAT THE ISRAELI LEADERS FEEL THAT ARAB LEADERS WOULD SERVE THE PROMOTION OF AN ARAB-ISRAELI DIALOGUE MUCH MORE BY INVITING LEADERS OF THE VARIOUS ISRAELI COMMUNITY GROUPS FROM ARAB COUNTRIES TO RENEW CONTACTS WITH THEIR FORMER HOMELANDS AND THE REMNANTS OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITIES LEFT IN THOSE COUNTRIES RATHER THAN BY ISSUING APPEALS TO DESERT ISRAEL, WHICH, IN ANY CASE, HAVE LITTLE CREDIBILITY.

3. BEN-SIMHON SAID THAT MOROCCAN OFFICIALS HAD ASSURED HIM DURING HIS RECENT VISIT THAT ON THE OCCASION OF A PLANNED WORLD ASSEMBLY OF LEADERS OF JEWISH COMMUNITIES OF NORTH AFRICAN ORIGIN TO BE HELD IN MOROCCO IN FEBRUARY 1978, ISRAELI REPRESENTATIVES WOULD BE PERMITTED TO ENTER THE COUNTRY WITH THEIR ISRAELI PASSPORTS. WHILE HE HAD STIPULATED THIS AS A PRE-CONDITION FOR HIS ORGANIZATION'S CONFIDENTIAL

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ASSURANCES THAT THIS WOULD BE POSSIBLE AS A SIGNIFICANT ACCOMMODATION. AT THE SAME TIME, HE TOO REMAINED PUZZLED AS TO THE REAL MOTIVES FOR THESE MOROCCAN OVERTURES TO THE JEWS AND PARTICULARLY TO ISRAEL. THIS MADE HIM UNSURE AS TO WHAT POLITICAL PLOY HIS ORGANIZATION MIGHT BE DRAWN INTO AND HOW TO JUSTIFY HIS ROLE BEFORE THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT.

4. COMMENTING ON THE IDENTITY AND DIALOGUE GROUP OF EXPATRIATE MOROCCAN JEWS IN FRANCE, BEN-SIMHON DESCRIBED IT AS SMALL, CLOSELY LINKED WITH THE MOROCCAN GOVERNMENT, BUT HAVING LITTLE INFLUENCE AMONG THE MOROCCAN JEWISH COMMUNITY OF FRANCE, MOST OF WHOSE MEMBERS AVOID IDENTIFICATION WITH IT. HOWEVER, HE CONCEDED THAT THIS GROUP HAD BEEN INSTRUMENTAL IN ARRANGING SOME OF THE RECENT VISITS BY ISRAELIS TO MOROCCO.

5. COMMENT: BEN-SIMHON HAS ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS INFORMED THE EMBASSY ABOUT OVERTURES MADE TO HIM BY THE MOROCCAN GOVERNMENT AND BY EXPATRIATE MOROCCAN JEWISH CONTACTS IN FRANCE. HE ALSO INFORMED US BOTH BEFORE AND AFTER HIS JUNE VISIT TO MOROCCO.

EMBASSY WOULD APPRECIATE DEPARTMENT AND EMBASSY RABAT
EVALUATIONS OF GOM MOTIVATIONS BEHIND SUCH OVERTURES.
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